

Lucy Thompson [Che-Na-Wah Weitch-Ah-Wah]. *To the American Indian: Reminiscences of a Yurok Woman*. (Berkeley: Heyday Books, 1991) xxx, 292 pp., \$30.00 paper.

Originally published in 1916, this autobiography of Lucy Thompson was accidentally rediscovered in the 1970s by Peter E. Palmquist when he was doing research on the photographer Emma B. Freeman. Palmquist sought out a copy of the book and what he found was Thompson's attempt to tell about her Yurok life in English, a language difficult for her to use to explain traditional Yurok culture. The original publication was poorly edited and locally printed, and, although this reprint has been edited to make it accessible, serious scholars might wish to compare this version to the original, which is available at the Beinecke Library at Yale University and elsewhere.

Lucy was born in the village of Pecwan in 1853 and married a white man, Milton James Thompson, in 1875. They lived for many years along the Klamath River and by 1910 had moved to Eureka, California. They had three children. Lucy outlived her husband and died on February 23, 1932, at the age of 79.

This reprint is introduced by Julian Lang, a Karuk traditional singer, dancer, and tribal scholar, who places Thompson's story within the geographical and cultural contexts of the Klamath River Indian communities of California. He likens Thompson's book to oral storytelling, "a seemingly (but not really) disorganized mosaic of experiences, anecdotes, and reminiscences" (xvii). Thompson's audience is local whites, and she attempts to relate to them in images and language they would understand. At the same time, she criticizes those Indians who are progressive and would abandon their traditions for assimilation. She is sometimes critical of her people for not being worthy of their noble Yurok heritage, and she believes that intermarriage has changed the traditional class system of her people. She provides no explanation for her own choice to marry outside of her tribe.

In several short chapters, Thompson provides information about traditional medicine, stories, dances, and history of geographical places. Although she indicates that most of the doctors were women, there were male doctors who had different roles in the tribes. Indian wealth was tied to a moral and spiritual code combined with a strict class system common to many tribes in the Northwest Coast area. The World Renewal Ceremony and the White Deerskin Dance are described as well as the Jump Dance. Changes in these traditions and others were the result of the influence of miners and settlers, particularly between 1849 and 1900.

Lucy Thompson's lifetime was a time of confusion and change for the people. In her preface, she identifies herself as "a pure full-blooded Klamath River Woman" (xxix). She places herself into a

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tradition where women had tattooed chins and spiritual leaders were called *Talth*. Among her people, she maintained her Native name; it was those outside the culture who knew her as Lucy Thompson. The name of "Lucy" was given to her by Bill McGarvey, the proprietor of a local store. McGarvey's store had several owners over the years, several of whom sold excessive amounts of alcohol to the Indians.

There were three kinds of traditional marriage described by Thompson: "high marriage" of the *Talth* class, the "half-married" among the slave clans where the woman owned all the property, and the "middle class" marriages which resulted from bartering and trading agreements. Discussing the customs of marriage and family, she relates that the birth of twins of the same sex resulted in one being raised and the other neglected and allowed to starve to death.

The Yurok had a rich storytelling tradition, and Thompson tells of creation and of the "white" people who used to live in the Klamath River area. Many of her "traditional stories" are remarkably close to Christian biblical stories; however, concepts of Heaven and Satan, a traditional "Christ" figure called Po-lick-oquare-ick, and an Indian "Samson" who was betrayed by his wife who burned his hair off, and a flood, all appear in her stories of the tribe. The stories also include mermaids who sat on rocks in the river and combed their long hair.

Lucy believes only she and her father remained as *Talth*, the highest class among her people. She believed when she wrote her book that she was the end of the religious line and with her death the religion would end. The book provides interesting insights into the beliefs and traditions of the Yurok people at the turn of the century when there was an increasing amount of influence from "outsiders." Although there have been changes, the traditions did not die out. Julian Lang relates that the World Renewal Jump Dance was held in 1982, revitalizing the traditions Thompson describes. Lucy Thompson would be pleased that the tradition she described did not pass away with her generation.

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